DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 446 689 HE 033 542

TITLE	Preparation of California Public High School Graduates for College, 1995 to 1998. Factsheet.
INSTITUTION	California State Postsecondary Education Commission, Sacramento.
REPORT NO	CPEC-00-2
PUB DATE	2000-01-00
NOTE	6p.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.cpec.ca.gov.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; *Achievement Gains; College Entrance Examinations; *College Preparation; College Students; Core Curriculum; Ethnic Groups; *High School Graduates; High Schools; *Higher Education; Racial Differences; *Student Characteristics; Test Results
IDENTIFIERS	*California

ABSTRACT

This fact sheet describes important changes in the academic characteristics of recent California high school graduates that relate directly to university eligibility and student preparation. The number of public high school graduates in California has grown by 9.7% since 1995, and the proportion of graduates who complete the full university college-preparatory curricula increased by 1.63%, from 34.9% in 1995 to 36.6% in 1998. This proportion increased among all racial-ethnic groups. Between 1995 and 1998 the percentage of graduates who completed Advanced Placement (AP) examinations also went up, from 12.7% to 14.1%, but large disparities persisted in AP participation by racial and ethnic group. More students took the ACT Assessment and the Scholastic Assessment Tests (SAT). The mean SAT verbal score for California high school graduates increased between 1995 and 1998 to 497, but it remains below the national mean of 505. The mathematics score also rose by 5 points, to 514, and it is now a few score points about the national mathematics mean of 512. Statewide SAT performance appears to be associated to some extent with socioeconomic status. ACT score have also risen, and the ACT composite score also appears to be associated with socioeconomic status. (SLD)

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Preparation of California Public High School Graduates for College, 1995 to 1998

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HE033543

Factsheet 00-2 *January 2000*

As the number of California high school graduates continues to rise over the next 10 years, demand for postsecondary education is expected to increase as well. It also is anticipated that the changing social, cultural, and academic characteristics and expectations of entering students will both challenge and enhance California colleges and universities.

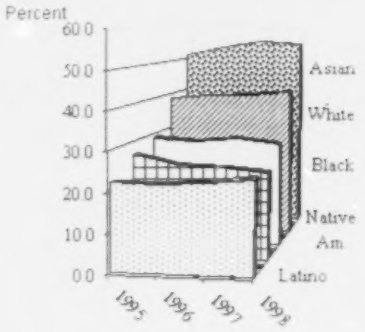
This fact sheet describes important changes in the academic characteristics of recent high school graduates that relate directly to university eligibility and student preparation.

College preparatory curriculum

The freshman admission criteria of the California State University and the University of California require applicants to complete nearly identical college preparatory curricula. Since 1994, public high schools have reported annually the proportion of graduates who complete the full set of university required courses with a "C" grade or better. Although the number of public high school graduates has grown by 9.7 percent since 1995, the proportion of graduates who completed the full university college-preparatory curricula increased by 16.3 percent -- from 34.9 percent in 1995 to 36.6 percent in 1998.

Equally noteworthy, the proportion of high school graduates who completed the college-preparatory curricula increased among students from all racial-ethnic groups, though the rates varied substantially, as illustrated in Display 1. In 1998 for example, 55 percent of Asian graduates and 40 percent of White graduates completed the university-preparatory curricula, whereas only 29 percent of Black graduates, 24 percent of Latino graduates, and 23 percent of Native American students did so.

DISPLAY 1 Proportion of Public High School Graduates Completing a College Preparatory Curriculum, 1995 to 1998

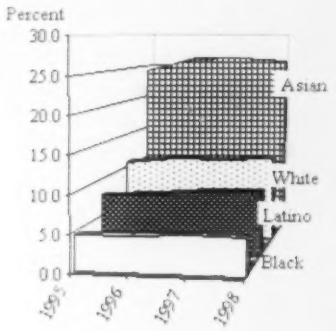


Advanced Placement participation

Another indicator of changes in the preparation level of students for college is the increasing number and proportion of California public high school twelfth graders who take Advanced Placement (AP) courses and tests. Earning a score of "3" or better on AP tests may qualify a student for college credit.

Between 1995 and 1998, the percentage of graduates who completed AP examinations went up from 12.7 percent to 14.1. Large disparities continue to persist, however, in AP participation by racial-ethnic group, as shown in Display 2. In 1998 , for example, the AP participation rate for Asian test takers was nearly twice the overall rate of 14.1 percent, whereas the AP rate for Black graduates was less than half the overall rate.

DISPLAY 2 Proportion of California Public High School Twelfth Graders in Advanced Placement Examinations, 1995 to 1998



Participation and performance on college admissions tests

California public universities require first-time freshmen applicants to submit scores for either the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT 1) or the American College Test (ACT).

Due in part to the burgeoning size of the State's public and private high school graduating class, the number of students taking the SAT increased by 12 percent over the reporting period to 142,139, while the number of ACT test takers increased during the same period by 5 percent to 35, 396. Displays 3 and 4 show the annual number of SAT 1 and ACT test takers by racial-ethnic group respectively.

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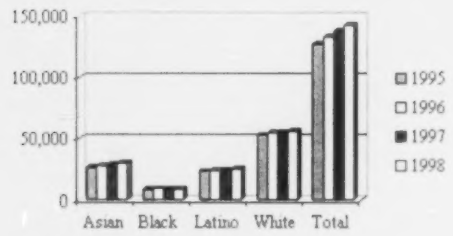
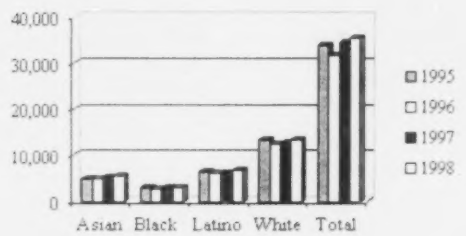
DISPLAY 3 California SAT I Tests Takers, 1994 to 1997



DISPLAY 4 California ACT Test Takers, 1994 to 1997



With respect to test performance, the mean SAT Verbal score for California graduates increased between 1995 and 1998 by five points to 497, but it is still below the national mean of 505. California's mean SAT Math score also rose by five points during the same period to 514 and it is now a few score points above the national Math mean of 512.

Statewide SAT performance, however, appears to be associated to some degree with socioeconomic status, with students from higher income families scoring better than students from less affluent families. For example, the mean SAT Verbal score for California students from families with a combined income of more than $100,000 was 557, while the mean SAT Math score for the same income group was 576.

Over the past three years, the mean ACT Composite score for California public and private graduates edged up 0.3 points to 21.2, now slightly above the national mean of 21.0. The ACT Composite score is the sum of the English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science Reasoning sections of the ACT. Like the SAT, the ACT also appears to be associated with socioeconomic status. For example, the mean Composite score for students from families with a combined income of more than $100,000 was 23.8, in comparison to the overall mean of 21.2.

Further information may be obtained from the Commission's Research Staff (916) 445-7933 or via e-mail at ResearchStaff@cpec.ca.gov.

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